The Ferry

by Daniel J. Evon

It was hot, still, as they walked up to the river despite the fact that the sun had already begun to turn a different color. It was a wet heat that hung heavily on the air. He wiped his brow with the back of his hand, then his hand upon his shorts.

“It never ends,” he said.

The man was tall, nearly six foot, but looked taller still standing next to the woman whom he was with. His hair was black and longer than it should have been, the drips of sweat extending his curls down the side of his face. He was rather plain looking, a gentle chin, undefined cheek bones, and sullen black eyes, but again, next to the woman, his image distorted slightly and he looked ugly, although he wasn't, just not particularly handsome.

“Yes,” she said. “The heat never goes away.”

Her face was red, along with her neck and shoulders, but the sweat that dripped from the crest of her forehead had a complimentary effect, making her look glistened more then dampened. It was hard for anything not to compliment her. Even her eyes took a different shade to compliment her mood. At the moment, the soft light from the river bounced green off of her radiant eyes.

The two of them stood at the long end of a pier that cut sharp into an L 25 feet out into the river. It was an old wooden pier that relished in its every crack and splinter regardless of the fresh coat of white paint that melted lazily over the rotting boards.

“It will,” he said, “I'm sure of that.”

He lit a cigarette with his back turned to the wind which blew north from the gulf through a tunnel built by the banks of the river. The wind was strong and pushed against the current. The water looked as if it were flowing backward, upstream. The man waited for the small bursts of spark that flickered before his eyes to catch and make fire.

“Wait till we're on the boat,” she said, but he paid no attention to her as the small sparks ached to create a flame.

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Across the river, a small ferry rested at a pier similar to the one which they sat. Small puffs of gray smoke rose from the pipes above it, as the general movement of people made its way back and forth across the deck.

“Shouldn't be long,” he said.

She sat cradled on the pier, her arms crossed over her knees, burying her head into the small hole of shade that she created. The man put the lighter back into his pocket and the unlit cigarette tucked behind his ear.

“You think we'll ever get used to it?” he asked. “The heat I mean.”

But she didn't answer and he turned back toward the opposite bank as if he had never said anything.

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When they reached the other bank the soft pink of the sun had begun to spread across the sky.

“Suns about to set,” the man said as the couple stepped off of the ferry. “Just in time.”

The two of them walked on top of a small hill that grew upwards from the edge of the river. The hill was made out of numerous lengths of cement, each of which was poorly covered by a layer of grass that seemed to have no root, nor place, yet still lived sparsely through the cracks that the earth had made in the pavement.

They walked in the direction of the sun, which had now set low enough that the bottom edge was held up by the water. It cast a strange light over the water that bounced over the shoulders of the waves, which seemed to roll back upon themselves.

“Doesn't it look strange?” he said.

The couple walked hand in hand along the crest of the man made hill. Her ring and pinky finger split enough to hold his index. It was a position that was uncomfortable at first, but now had grown into them, making anything else feel strange. When they had first started dating the forced space between her two fingers gave her a small annoying pain that had since disappeared. It was a pain that she had grown into and now no longer noticed.

“The water, how it moves.” he said, as he pointed out onto the water. The woman kept her eyes on the ground, carefully balancing between the cracks in the sidewalk.

“It looks like it's running, or escaping or something. Like the whole river inevitably flows to the gulf, but it doesn't want to.”

She lifted her chin and smiled a closed lip smile like she had been cued. It was important for him to be acknowledged even if he knew that she wasn't listening. But she didn't mind. He thought too much, too loud, and too often, and thought that he was smarter then he was.

“Like it's afraid. I don't know, like it had gotten used to being a river you know. Flowed all the way done from wherever it came from, and now its time to leave, and it's not ready.”

“It's just the wind,” she said.

“I know it's just the wind. But don't you think, it makes sense right?”

“I suppose”

“Well maybe not sense, like in the logical sense. But…”

He trailed off as his thoughts began to disconnect.

“It's still pretty though, right?”

“It is,” she said.

The man took a seat on a bench that faced the river and pulled her down next to him. He put his arm around her shoulder and kissed her on the cheek.

“I love you,” escaped his lips with no more effort than a breath.

She kissed him and squeezed his thigh.

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“It always goes faster at the end,” he said.

The sun had disappeared behind the horizon and now just the remnants of different shades of pink were left on the lingering clouds.

“It takes the whole day for the sun to move across the sky and then at the last moment, its gets in a big hurry.”

“Like a runner.”

“Yeah, just like a runner about to cross a finish line, like it wasn't sure if it was going to make it or not.”

“It's just the way it looks.”

“I know,” he said. “Everything's about how it looks. Like now, if we weren't here right now, if we didn't just see the sun set. Well that might as well be the sun rising.”

The brightness of the sun had begun to soften in her eyes as the long shadow of the horizon began to spread up the river.

“You know, if we didn't know which directions was which, the whole image changes. It can be anything we want, any way we want to see it.”

“No,” she said, “it can't.”

The man took the cigarette out from behind his ear and urged the spark to catch. He turned his back to her and shielded the lighter from the wind, doing everything he could to make the spark maintain.

“That will always be the sunset,” she said with a tenor in her voice that he didn't recognize, a tone that didn't ring familiar.

“Yeah, but, well don't you ever wonder if things were different?”

She put her hand on his knee and he quickly covered it up with his, wedging his index finger between the gap of her pinkie and ring. It felt strange, the way it first had.

“Things are different, but not like that…” she said.

The sun was now gone and the dark shadow had become the night. A dim bulb flickered in a street post behind the bench, giving them enough light to see the details of shadow on each others faces.

“…They change the way they always have...”

The ferry was in the middle of the river, crossing back to the side where the couple sat. Above them, the first small specs of star light had punctured through the dark blue blanket of sky and a crescent moon sat low over the opposite bank.

“…The sun will always set, eventually, no matter how you look at it…”

The dim light of the moon still highlighted the tiny caps of the river waves as they gently rolled back on themselves, trying to

escape the inevitable. He squeezed her hand, and looked into her brown eyes.

“…and that slow change, between night and day, becomes almost unnoticeable…”

“We should catch the ferry,” he said.

“…but its inevitable.”

He stood up and gave her his hand. The stars had taken over the majority of the sky and the couple walked leisurely toward the ferry. It should have been romantic, the boat ride across the river under the peppered sky, but she couldn't help but feel the absence of the sun, and for the first time, a small chill, crept up her spine.